

A
SERMON

Preacht at

St. GEORGE'S Church

AT
WINDSOR.

Septemb. 27. 1685.

By EDWARD PELLING, Chaplain to
his Grace the Duke of Somerset.

Printed by Order.

LONDON,

Printed for Sam. Keble, at the Turks Head in Fleet-
street, and Walter Davis, in Amen Corner. 1685.

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1 PET. 3. 13.

And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good.

IT may seem very strange, that words to this purpose should drop from St. Peters mouth; if we understand them so, as if good Men could not be intreated after an evil manner. For the whole History of those times wherein the Apostles lived, contradicteth this Assertion, if we take it Universally, and at large. Stephen had been already stoned; and at the same time a great persecution was raised against the Church at Jerusalem, Act. 8. James the Brother of John was killed, and St. Peter himself had been committed to

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Prison

Prison, *Act* 12. And how many sorts of ill usage did *Paul* and *Silas*, and the rest receive at the hands of Infidels, in those times? Nay, our Apostle himself supposeth that good men might suffer for their righteousness, at the Verse immediately following my Text; *But and if ye suffer for Righteousness sake, happy are ye*, and so on. Either then we must deny plain matters of Fact; or else we must suppose the Christians of those times not to have been followers of that which is good; or else we must conclude that *St. Peter* had in this Place a further meaning, besides that which lyeth open to our first view.

Therefore in discoursing upon this portion of Scripture, I shall

1. Shew what is the full and genuine sense of the words.
2. Demonstrate the Truth of that, which *St. Peter* doth here intend.
3. And so, in the third place, bring down the whole to our own Practice, with respect to those Circumstances which we our selves are in at this present juncture.

As to the First, the Apostles meaning must needs be this; that none will hurt us, if they have a true respect for Vertue and Goodness, as long as they see us follow that which is plainly and manifestly good; as long as they are *satisfied*, and *convinced* of our Integrity; as long as we discharge our Reputation as well as our Consciences; as long as our Light so shineth before men, that they see our good works,
and

and cannot but confess, that of a Truth
 our Conversation is honest and upright, and
 in every respect, such as doth become the pro-
 fession of Christs Religion. Sometimes it is
 not enough for us to be innocent, unless our
 Innocence doth *appear*, so that we may be
 able to stop the mouths, and put to silence
 the ignorance of foolish men, if their fore-
 heads be but tollerably tender. It was the ve-
 ry case of Christians in the Apostolical Age :
 Though Piety and Vertue was the great care
 and imployment of their Lives; though they
 valued a good Conscience above the whole
 World, yet strangers to the Faith were every
 where mistaken in them, and 'twas a long time
 before they could conquer those strong preju-
 dices they had entertained against them. The
Jews on the one hand lookt upon them as In-
 novators and Hereticks : Though their Religi-
 on was not any new thing, but a Reformation of
 those abuses which had crept into the Church
 by degrees, yet their new Name gave offence
 (for they were first called Christians at *Anti-
 och*) and their Enemies believed that their Faith
 was New also. Where was your Religion be-
 fore Christ ? As those superstitious people
 were ready to object. They were angry at the
 supposed Novelty of the Christian Religion ;
 though if that was a Reproach to the Reforma-
 tion *then*, that it was of so late a date, the
 quarrel seem'd. to be with God himself, because
 he sent not his Son *sooner* into the World.
 On the other hand, the *Pagans* lookt upon the
 followers

*Si semper ea
 qua Planè bona
 sunt imitemini ;
 Grot. in Loc.*

*Vide Euseb.
 Hist. Ecclesi.
 lib. 1. c. 4.*

followers of Jesus as a seditious sort of men; that carried on an interest in opposition to the Interest of the Roman Empire? Christ himself was reviled as *Cæsars* Enemy; and his Disciples had the Character of people that turned the World upside down; that did all things contrary to the decrees of *Cæsar*, *Act. 17*. Many violent prejudices were against them, and the generality of people ran away with abundance of gross mistakes concerning them and their Religion; which nothing but time and Patience could possibly Remove. And therefore *St. Peters* business in the Text was, to persuade them, not only to be followers of that which was Good (for so they were already) but moreover to give all possible Demonstrations of their integrity. And that this was the Apostles sense appears clearly from those words, but three Verses after my Text, that whereas men speak Evil of you, as of Evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your Good Conversation in Christ. Nothing could make their Enemies ashamed, but Notoriety of fact; the way to make them blush was to let them see what horrible mistakes they were under; then they would be ashamed, when 'twas made clear and apparent, how Right and pure the Christian Religion was; as the learned *Grotius* hath noted upon that place: *ut scilicet si de rebus et actibus vestris, ut de rebus et actibus vestris, ut de rebus et actibus vestris*. So that the full meaning of the Apostle here is, this, that when once we give plain and unquestionable Proofs that we are really follow-

*Hoc ipsum eis
pudori erit, ubi
apparuerit ex
factis vestris
quàm recta et
pura sit Christi-
ana Religio.
Grot. in 1 Pet.
3. 16.*

ers of that which is Good; when once we make it clear and evident to the World; so that all Men of sense and common honesty must needs grant that we are so, we have reason enough to believe then that all things will go very well with us; especially when such as are a terrour to evil-doers, do not affect upon any mean, any dishonourable, any base designs; but profess a due regard, and love for goodness, and therefore cannot be rationally supposed to be willing at any time to afflict, or unless it be unfortunately upon misinformation and mistakes; which was indeed the case of the Primitive Christians; but cannot be ours now, unless the fault be our own first.

2. The sense of the Text being thus cleared, I propose, in the second place, to demonstrate the Truth of the thing. And for the clearing of that too, many arguments might be offered to your consideration.

As, First, concerning the good Providence of God, which never faileth such good men; as conscientiously and honestly act in subserviency to the Honour and Interest of true Religion. And when all is done, that lieth in the power of second and subordinate Causes, The Providence of God is the only certain and infallible security we may depend upon with confidence. Every thing in the World but Providence, is uncertain and contingent: 'Tis this, that is the great security for all Societies, States, and Kingdoms to trust to; nay the only stablement, the whole frame

frame of the Universe depends upon, which without this Prop and Stay, had been long ago shattered into its Primordial Chaos. So that when men of Atheistical Spirits laugh at us as a sort of credulous and easie people, for casting our selves upon Providence in all Cases; Our answer is not more religious than 'tis rational, that we trust to that which hath hitherto preserved and supported the whole world.

2. Besides, Secondly, there is in all men such an operative and stirring Principle (common to Mankind, because fixt and radicated in our common nature) that tho Goodness may seem somewhat hard in its practice, yet 'tis very pleasant and lovely to the Eye; and nothing is more apt either to be commended, or protected by those, who under God do superintend the affairs of the World; especially by those whose Spirits are refined from the Feculency of savage and *sordid* natures; whose Souls are truly generous and *great*; whose tempers are *humane*; and who go upon Principles of Honour; tho their Judgments may be possess'd with several Notions that are different from other mens. *Tiberius* was none of the best of those Roman Emperours that were Heathen, and yet we are told by *Tertullian*, who was so excellently skilled in the Laws and History of *Rome*, that when *Tiberius* heard of the Miracles which had been done by our blessed Saviour, and was there-

Tiberius cuius tempore nomen Christianum in seculum introiit, annuntiata sibi ex Syria Palestina qua illic veritatem ipsius divinitatis revelaverat, detulit ad Senatum cum prerogativa Suffragii sui. Tertul. Apol.

by constrained to believe that he was both a good man, and a divine Person, he moved the Senate, that Christ might be put into the number of their Gods. Some say, that *Pilate* himself sent the Emperour an account of the works and innocence of the blessed Jesus, and tho' *Pilate* excused the Judgment he had given against him, being * imposed upon and deceived by the Jews, yet *Tiberius* condemned him to death because he had any hand at all in the death of

Vide Laurent. de la Barre Annotat. in Tertul. Apolog.

* *Quibus persuasionibus seductus ipse, fidem querelis eorum adhibui, &c. Ep. Pilati.*

Christ. Which Story, if it be true, is an argument, that if *Tiberius* himself had been then in *Pilate's* place, he, tho' an Heathen, would have protected our Lords innocence, who was afterwards such a friend to his memory. This is certain, that *Pilate's* wife sent importunately to him as he sat upon the Judgment-Seat, to hinder all bloody proceedings against our Lord, because she was satisfied that he was a Just Man (for so she called him, *S. Matth. 27. 19.*) 'Twas the sense of our Saviours innocency, that made that woman so earnestly to interpose, tho' she was guided only by natural Conscience.

But it is not time for me yet to meddle with the History of those first Ages of Christianity. It is a passage, that casually fell under my hands; and it confirms a little this observable Truth, that substantial and solid Vertue never suffers in any high degree, where 'tis thoroughly known and discovered; unless by chance and by some special permission of God it suffers at the hands of some anomalous Creature, some monstrous Figure of a Man (as *Pilate* was) that has cast

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off

off all regard to Humanity, and Honour, and true Greatness, as well as bid defiance to all manner of Religion.

3. I might add, in the third place, that the following of that which is Good (especially if we follow it so as our Saviour did, and as he hath chalked out the way to us) hath such a Natural Tendency to Promote ; even the Secular advantages and wellfare of all Mankind, that few who understand , none that value their own Interest, will be either so Ungrateful, or so Impolitick, and so much enemies to themselves, as to injure Men whose Principles and Practices apparently tend to the common Good of All. Such is the Nature of those admirable Virtues, which our Lord hath left us to transcribe, that no other Institution whatsoever can serve more to the Advantage, or so much to the Quiet and Peace of the World, as our Religion doth, when 'tis Conscientiously and Honestly observed. We are bound to follow Peace as well as Holiness ; to love one another, and even our implacable Enemies ; to study to be Quiet, to do every Man his own Business, and to abide in his own Calling ; not to do Evil, though for Good ends ; but to commit our selves to God in Well-doing ; to be Humble, Gentle, and Meek ; to pay Tribute to whom Tribute is due, and Honour to whom Honour ; to give to *Cesar* the things that are *Cesars*, as well as to God the things that are Gods, to be subject to Principalities and Powers ; to obey Magistrates ; and to be subject

not only for wrath, but also (and chiefly) for Conscience sake. And who is he that will harm us, if we be found to be followers of that which is Good, according to these Measures and Rules? He is the Minister of God to us for Good, saith the Scripture, *Rom. 13. 4.* And if Experience tells him, that we are Servants to him for his Good too, we have no reason to fear the Edge of that Sword, which is never drawn to cut off a Friend.

4. But for the full proof of this Assertion in my Text, that none will harm us, if we be known to be followers of that which is Good, I shall take leave to search a little into the History of the Primitive Ages, and Examine how Matters went with Christians in those Times, as often as they made it appear that they were followers of that which was Good. For if it can be proved, that as they cleared their Integrity; so they found Ease, and Encouragements, even under a Heathen Government, there can be no room for any inordinate Jealousies among Us, whose Lot (God be blessed) is fallen in a Religious and Christian state, if we be careful to acquit our selves to the whole World, by discharging our duty with Fidelity and Courage, as the Ancient Christians did theirs.

Now nothing can be clearer out of the Writings of all the Old Apologists for Christianity, than that the *Pagans* were infinitely mistaken in their Opinions of the Church, and that they used the Members of it hardly upon those wrong Presumptions: To Rectifie these mi-

* *Dolemus de Ignorantia vestra, &c. Tertull. ad Scapulam. Ita utrumque ex alterutro redarguimus, & Ignorare illos dum oderunt, & injuste odisse dum ignorant. Id Apolog. adv. Gentes. Cap. 1. Illud solum expectatur, quod Odio publico necessarium est, Confessio Nominis, non Examinatio criminis. Tert. Lib. Supr.*

Testimonium ignorantia est, quae iniquitatem dum excusat, condemnatur; cum omnes qui retro oderant, quia ignorabant quale esset, quod oderant, simul ut desinant ignorare, & desistent & Odisse. Tert. Apol. cap. 1.

stakes, and so to make their Enemies to be at Peace with them, the Doctors of the Church desired nothing more, than that the Emperors would please to Examine their Doctrines and Manners: They wondered at the Rashness of their Tormentors; and laid the blame of their violent and unjust proceedings upon their gross * Ignorance: For they were tortured for the sake of their Name, because they called themselves Christians; the Pagans enquiring no further, whether they were Thieves or Rebels or any other Criminals in the Eye of the Laws, but taking all for granted, that the Wickedness of Men could lay to their charge. This was a very hard case; yet those Excellent Christians submitted to it with Patience and Cheerfulness, hoping that in time the Experience of their Enemies would convince them, and engage them to be favourable to Christianity. And 'tis

very Remarkable and Apposite to our purpose what *Tertullian* observed, that all those who had hated Christianity, because they knew not what it was, as soon as ever their Ignorance was Removed, their Hatred ceased: also; This is a plain Evidence of what I am now shewing, that when good Men acquit themselves well to the World, it ever goes well with them: But for our plenary satisfaction in this point, let us look a little into some particular instances.

The first that rais'd a general Storm against the Church was Nero. But tho he was infamous for his Sanguinary and barbarous temper, yet to me it seems manifest that his cruelties were groundd upon his perfect ignorance of the Christians Innocence ; for they were represented then as people of a new and mischievous Religion (as *Suetonius* said) as a deadly and pernicious Sect (saith *Tacitus*) that were generally hated ; and therefore the fittest (as the Emperour thought) to have the guilt of burning the City of *Rome* fixed upon them. Particularly they were abused (as I observed before out of the Acts of the Apostles) as Movers of Sedition, and enemies of the Roman Empire : The belief whereof past currantly at *Rome*, where they made no distinction between Christians and Jews, because Christianity came out of *Judea* ; and considering how restless, factious and ungovernable the Jews had been, not onely in the * beginning of *Nero's* Reign, but also in the time of his Predecessor *Claudius* (as *Josephus* doth || acknowledg the Emperour, took up a mortal and flaming hatred against the Christians, supposing them to be as troublesome and as the rest,

*Orientem fidem Romæ pri-
mus Nero cruentavit, Tertul-
in Scorpiac. Vide & Apol.
cap. 5.*

*Afflicti suppliciiis Christia-
ni ; genus hominum superstitio-
nis nova ac maligna, Suet.
in Nerone, Sect. 16.*

— Quos per flagitia invidios,
vulgus Christianos appellabat,
Tacit. Annal. lib. 15.

— Exitialis superstitio, id.
ibid.

— Haud perinde in crimine
incendii, quam odio Humani
generis convulsi sunt. *Tacit. i-
bid.*

* *Vide Jos. Scaligeri animad-
vers. in Euseb. Chron. pag.
192. num. MMLXIX.*

|| *Vide Joseph. Antiq. Judaic.
lib. 19. cap. 4. & lib. 20. c.
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Item de bello
Judaic. l. 2. c. 20, 21, 22, 23.
Vide & Euseb. Hist. Eccles.
lib. 2. c. 11. & 21.*

But

But when *Vespasian* came to the Throne (that Humane and Good-natured Prince, who was wont to weep even at the * Just sufferings of Criminals) all Bloody proceedings against our Religion were stopt. For he had been at *Jerusalem* in Person; and having observed there the vast difference between the Turbulent and Obstinate temper of the *Jews*, and the Peaceable behaviour of the Christians, he was particularly Favourable and Kind to these : So that though he had Ruined the *Jews* (as *Tertullian* observes) and though he

* *Ceterum neque
cade cuiusq; un-
quam letatus,
iustis supplicis
illachrymavit
etiam & inge-
nuit.* Suet. in
Vespasian. §. 13.

|| *Euseb. Hist. Lib. 3. cap. 12.*

* --- *Nullus Vespasianus, quam-
vis Judæorum debellator, &c.*
Tertul. Apol. Cap. 6.

— *Καί τις τῶ παλαιοῦ αὐτοῦ
ἱστορίας, μὲν δὲ καὶ
ἡμεῖς ἀποτοῦ ἐκείνου αἰσθάνομεν.*
Euseb. Hist. Lib. 3. Cap. 17.

Domitianus,
portio Neronius
de credulitate,
Tertul. Apol.
cap. 5.

The next cruel Emperour was *Domitian*; a limb of *Nero* (as *Tertullian* calls him) that not only banisht *St. John* into *Patmos*, but miserably vexed the whole Christian Church. The Occasion of his barbarity was no other then *Herods* fear, that Christ would come; and take his Empire from him; which fear was increased by a false suggestion, touching the Seditious Spirits of Christs Disciples. But lighting happily upon some of them, and (as they say) some of our Blessed Saviours own Kindred; and finding upon examination, that they

Vide Euseb. Hist. Eccles.
lib. 3. c. 20. Sed quia
homo, facile captum repres-
sit, restituit etiam quos
relegaverat, inquit Ter-
tullianus de Domitiano.

were

were a plain and honest sort of Men, that paid Tribute, and wrought diligently in their vocation with their own hands, and lived quietly, and hoped for no Kingdom but that in another world; he straight gave over his severity, being fully satisfied, that Christians were followers of that which was Good.

Hence on to the time of *Trajan*, we hear no more of the Christians sufferings. Then indeed the Instruments of death were used afresh against them, upon the old stale presumption, that they were Evil doers. But *Pliny* writing to *Trajan* was so just to the Christians, that he told the Emperour, all he found by the Christians was, that on a certain day they were wont to meet together, and Sing Hymns to Christ, and bound themselves by a Sacrament, not to be guilty of Thefts, or Robberies, or Adultery, or breach of Faith, nor of any other Crime. Whereupon *Trajan* ordered, that the inquisition against Christians should be presently stopt; and so the Rage of that time went soon off, when 'twas discovered what a good sort of Men the Christians were.

*Vide Ep. Plinii
Trajano, &
Trajani Plinio;
Plin. Ep. l. 10.
Item Tertul. A-
pol. c. 1. & 6;*

Then came the Emperour *Adrian*, who, tho' he made no new Edicts against the Christians, yet permitted those that were to * be put in force, supposing (as others before him did) that Christians were a troublesome and intra-

*|| Tertul. Apol. c. 6.
* Quarta sub Adriano persecutio numeratur; Sulp. Sever.*

stable

Euseb. in Chronico.

* Vide Just. Martyr. Apolog.
p. 99 & 100. Item Apol.
Melitonis in Euseb. Hist. Ec.
cles. lib.

Ælius Lamprid. in vit. Alex.
Sever.

Stable Sect, especially upon that Rebellion of the *Jews*, which fell out in the beginning of *Adrian's* government. But when *Aristides* and *Quadratus* had presented their Excellent Apologies to him, he found that he had been deceived in his Opinion, and so proceedings were presently mitigated for he wrote a Letter to *Minucius Fundanus* the Proconsul of * *Asia*, and to many more of his Officers in

several other parts of the VWorld, requiring them to deal mildly with Christians, and reprehending such as wrongfully brought them into Trouble. Nay one Pagan Historian reports of this Emperor *Adrian*, that himself built a Temple and dedicated it unto Christ, and Worshippt him as a God.

Post Adrianum Antonino Pio imperante, pax Ecclesiis fuit, Sulpit. Sever. lib. 2.

To go on further, afterwards in the Reign of *Antoninus Pius*, though here and there divers Christians suffered by the officious malice of some inferiour Ministers of State; yet that merciful and Generous Prince (who was wont to say, *He had rather save one Citizen, than kill a Thousand Enemies*) soon restored Peace unto the Church. The reason was, because that great Luminary of the Church *Justin* the Philosopher, and at last a Martyr, wrote an excellent Apology to *Antoninus*, and the whole Senate complaining of the injustice of proceedings, and shewing the innocence of the Christians Doctrines, Rites, and Lives. Upon
vvhich

which the Emperor being now satisfied, that those men were followers of that which was good, did in a Letter to the Common Council of Asia, and to all the Greeks (which is yet extant) sharply blame his Officers for their rashness; and ordered, that no Christian should suffer more, unless he attempted the disturbance of the Empire; which he was morally assured, no true Christian would go about.

Indeed his Successor *Aurelius Antoninus* most grievously afflicted the Church in several places of the Empire. For new accusations were invented; and therefore New Edicts were published against them. But all this while even that Emperor seem'd to have been mistaken concerning the Church; for it is not credible that a person of such great worth as *Antoninus* was of (being an exquisite Philosopher, and a Stoick) would have been so cruel to good men; but would have spared them at least, for common Morality and Virtue sake, had he been satisfied of their Integrity. However, when *S. Melito*, *Apollonaris*, *Athenagoras*, and some more, openly vindicated themselves and their Brethren, and desired nothing but that Justice might be done them, it had a mighty Effect and Influence upon the Emperor; though nothing wrought on him so much as the Miraculous Rain which fell at the Prayers of the Christians, when he and his Army were in the bowels of *Germany* ready to perish for want of

Vide Justin. Apol. in fine. Euseb. Hist. lib. 5. c. 5. Tertul. Apolog. c. 5.

Water : then he was Convinced, that God was with the Christians; and so set out an Edict, that they should be kindly used for the future, and that whosoever should accuse a Christian only under the Notion of a Christian (as if that were Crime enough) should be burnt alive.

*De Severo vide
Tertul. ad Scapulam.*

And so the course of the World went tolerably well, till *Severus* gat into the Throne; nay indeed for some time after : For at first he was very favourable to our Religion, having some Knowledge of it, and a kind Opinion of its Professors. For (as we are told by *Tertullian*, who flourisht in his time) he entertained one *Proculus*, a Christian in his own Palace, and was not displeased though he knew, that *Proculus* instructed his Son *Antoninus Caracalla* in the Christian Religion; he was gracious to many of the *Roman* Nobility, whom he knew to be Christians, and protected them from the Rage and fury of the populace. 'Twas pitty indeed he did not go on, when he was in so good a way; but the truth is, many great men there were, that were pertinaciously addicted to Heathen Superstition and Idolatry, and never left raising and carrying of lies to his Ears against the Christians; and he believing them upon their report, became quite another man, if I may so call that Barbarous Wretch; vvhich provoked *Tertullian* to write his admirable Apology; wherein he vindicated

icated the honour of our Religion, and the innocence of its professors; which tho' it had little effect upon *Severus* himself, yet it had upon his Son *Caracalla*, so that his Reign vvas peaceable, as his Successors was too; till *Maximinus* made foul Work again: But we need not wonder at him; for he vvas a man of sordid Birth, and Brutish inclinations; first a Shepherd, then a Robber upon the High ways, next a Soldier, and at last a Prince forsooth, though a Prince that would understand nothing but Arts of wickedness, and therefore deserves to stand by himself. If you reckon from *Now* downward, you will find *Tertullians* Observation True, that of all the *Roman* Emperors to his time, there was none that had any ordinary regard for Natural Religion or Humanity, who offered violence to the Christians; when once they thoroughly discovered what the Nature of Christianity, and the temper of Christians was.

Tert. Apol. c. 5.

And the same Observation I might pursue further on still, even to the days of *Constantine*; had I time to do it, and were the thing necessary, after what has been shew'd already. For still as our Religion appeared (I say industriously, Our Religion; for that which was then the Apostolical and Catholick Religion there, is ours now; as it appeared) in its Native Beauty:

it ever commanded, first the Pity, then the protection, and at last the Love of all that had Souls, of all that had any value for Virtue and honour, till in the end Princes themselves were enamour'd with it, and counted the Cross the Noblest Ornaments of their Crowns and Scepters.

3. But I shall not make any more Historical Observations, presuming that these few are sufficient for the confirmation of the point in hand. VVhence I shall now by vvay of application of this vvhole matter, put that question of the Apostles in the Text vvith reference to our selves, And vvho is he that vvill harm us, if vve be followers of that vvhich is good? Had the Primitive Christians, been of some mens temper; had they taken such a prospect of times, as some among us are ready to take, whose fears are apt to reach as far as the VVorlds end; 'tis a wonder if they had not answer'd St. Peter thus, Nero will undoubtedly hurt us, and so may *Vespasian* and *Titus* too, nay *Constantine* himself, for ought we know, to be sure such a one will, if we be not so Politick as to exclude him before hand, and provide some strong Association in time. But this vvvas not their Temper, nor St. Peters Jealousie: All that he had to direct them, and all that they had to take care of, vvvas this, to be followers still of that

that which was good, and to follow it so, as to approve themselves to God, and to the VWorld, to make it plain and manifest, that Vertue and a good Conscience was their whole study; this, this was that, which carried them out, which supported the Honour of Religion, which secur'd its Interest, which made it lovely, stable, prosperous, even in times of Heathenism.

Now if we too take this Christian, this Prudent and effectual course, who is he that will go about to annoy us? Little Troubles indeed we must never expect to be free from as long as the VWorld standeth: For the Church of Christ hath ever been vexed with some Briers or other, some Thorns have ever been in its sides; nor hath Our Church been without them; we have had some Brambles of our own growth, that have made our Church not only smart, but bleed too: Nay, we have had such of late, as like that Bramble in the parable, *Jud. 9.* would in all haste have been Reigning over us, and would have devoured all the great Trees in *Lebanon*. Perhaps we may never be free from those scratching, but contemptible Shrubs as long as the old Curse continues upon the Earth; some or other may still be springing up among us: But the Church can never dye of a Thorn; nor can such paultry things do us any considerable

nable injury, especially when they are overdropt by the Tall Cedars; while we shall be protected under their shadow, if we do but know and adorn our Station, and grow in Grace, and be manifestly and plainly mindful of that which is good.

What hard Usages did yet Primitive Christians undergo, who were taught, not with Briers and Thorns only, as the Expression is, *Jude 8.* but with Harrows and Axes too? And yet you see what advice was given them here in the Text; and because experience and matter of Fact is such a strong argument. I have particularly shew'd you how successful that advice was, and even in those most discouraging times, when Tyranny was the Government, and Paganism was the Religion of the World.

Blessed for ever, blessed be God, this is infinitely far from being any part of our Case; Nay, but that some love to be ungrateful both to God and Man, methinks we should all look upon our selves as obliged (I am sure, we are highly bound) to tender Heaven our most hearty Thanks, that notwithstanding all our High and Monstrous Provocations (that which is proper for us always to consider and think of) God is still so propitious to us, as that we have a very fair prospect, touching the security not of
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our Persons and Fortunes only, but of that too, which is and ought to be, far dearer to us than our very Lives; I mean, our Establishment and incomparable Religion.

Having therefore such encouragements, and those grounded upon such Foundations, let us, in the Name of God, once more observe the directions in the Text, and shew our selves still hearty followers of that which is good. We may be sure no valuable injury can be done us, if we our selves be but careful to do Our part; that which is both our Duty and interest to do. Therefore instead of leaping over our Line, to trouble our selves and the VVorld with inordinate Fears, let us seriously apply our minds to our Business, our proper and necessary business; not doubting, but that which served so to carry out the Old Christians, will serve much more, to secure us, not from Calamity only, but even from danger of it: Two things especially were unjustly laid to their Charge, *viz.* that their Religion was New, and that they themselves were wicked: When once these two points were fully cleared, Sovereign Princes became not their Friends only, but their fellow Christians too.

Now as to the first of these (an accusation, vvhich hath been unjustly laid to
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Our charge too) vve have made it abundantly evident to all sober and teachable, though prejudiced persons, that our Faith is that vvvhich vvas once for all delivered unto the Saints. This vve vvill for ever abide by, this vve vvill be bound to make evident still. But if men vvill not see our Evidence, vve confels it is not in our povver to vvork such a Miracle, as to put eyes into the blind, and force them to see, vvwhether they vvill or no; and yet I cannot tell, but time and Constancy may do even that too, as it did in the former Ages of Christianity.

As Our Faith is manifestly Pure, Catholick, and Apostolical; so let us do it that Honour and Right (novv especially) as to make it plain and Evident to the World, that our manners are suitable thereunto. This vvas the Great Evidence that in ancient times did by degrees so affectually convince the Enemies of our Religion; for by observing the Excellent Lives of Christians, they vvvere Naturally led first to a search, then to an Admiration, and in the end to the profession of our Doctrines, and by these means our Religion came not only to a quiet, but to a Regnant condition in the World.

For your imitation and Encouragement
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in this Case, shall I now at the close of this Discourse tell you, what those good things were, which were then so taking and amiable in their Eyes? Why, in short it was this; an entire, sincere, and Universal Practice of the precepts of Christianity. St. Paul hath drawn up all into a short Summary in *Philip. 4.* A place, where he advised the *Philippians* to be careful for nothing, meaning the things of this World, which the generality of men are apt to be most careful for: *Be careful for nothing*, ver. 6. and then he adds, ver. 8. *Finally, Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are Honest, whatsoever things are Just, whatsoever things are Pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of Good Report; if there be any Vertue, if there be any Praise, think on these things.* These things the Primitive Christians had learned, and received, and heard, and seen in the Holy Apostles; as it follows there; and as they did and practised these things, so the God of Peace, was still with them, till he made their very Enemies to be at Peace with them also.

Yet by the History of those times I observe, that there were some special and particular Vertues which the *Pagans* took great notice of, and were induced to be very favourable and kind to the Christians for. As *Severus* the Emperour was exceed-

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ingly pleased with that Command of our Blessed Saviours, so that he had it engraved upon his Plates, Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do you unto them: In like manner other Princes were pleas'd and taken with some singular Remarks in the Lives of Christs followers, which they observed perhaps above other things, because they did most conduce to the Honour, and interest, and peace of their Government: And these were the things, The Primitive Christians were very diligent and honest in their several Callings; they minded their own business, nor meddling with matters that were out of their Sphear, especially with the business of their Governours: They studied to be quiet, and as much as in them lay, lived peaceably with all men: They were just in their dealings with all men; and very Candid, and charitable in their censures of their Rulers. They abhorred that Villanous Practice of suspecting and reviling Magistrates: They were afraid for Conscience sake to raise and disperse lies, to render Princes odious; but did ever put the kindest Constructions upon their Counsels and proceedings, that they were capable of. They would not by any means affront them, or contumeliously use them, or speak evil of them, or pray backward for them (I mean, pray for their ill fortune or ruine, as some pestilent Men would

would now adays make us believe) no they behaved themselves towards them (though mortal Enemies to their Faith) with modesty and reverence, and all due respect. They paid them their Tribute Mony honestly; they served them in their Wars with all Fidelity and Courage. If any thing was required of them, which was inconsistent with a good Conscience, and the Laws of Christ, they would decline it indeed, even unto Death, but still with tenderness, and a Religious regard to the Honour and Authority of the Emperor. They lookt upon him as Gods immediate Minister, next to God, and subject only unto him, and therefore unaccountable to any in this world; and accordingly they feared, and honoured, nay loved him, because he was Gods Deputy here below, and in the Earth Supreme. They never went to their Devotion, but the Emperor had a great share of it; and even when times were ominous and threatening, then too they would pray for his Health, and long life, for Victory in his Arms, and for his wellfare and good success in all his just Undertakings. As for resistance, they detested and disclaimed the very thoughts of it, so that they would suffer themselves to be cut in pieces rather than they would rebel, though several Laws were on their side, and they had the Sword in their Hands, and had strength

and Forces enough to to make the whole Empire tremble. In all lawful instances, none more ready to obey, none more faithful in their obedience ; but in other Cases, none so willing to dye at their Princes Feet, as the Christians were.

These are some of those things which are honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report ; and by following these good things, the World was at last satisfied, that they were good men ; and so the Church by degrees wrought it self out of those difficulties and hardships, which it felt and lay under, when our Religion first entered into the World.

Happy shall we be now, if like the Old Christians, we be thus followers of that which is Good ; so that all men may see, and be convinced that we are so. This is that which will be a security to our Church an Honour to our Religion, a Comfort and satisfaction, as well as a security to our selves : 'Tis that which will not only bring Peace to us in this Life, but will bring us all to those unspeakable Joys and Comforts in another, where infinity of pleasure is laid up in store, as the endless portion of all those Blessed Souls, that Love the Lord Jesus in sincerity.

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